



## OHIO

*“My father always told me that it is important to give something back to nature and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has allowed me to do that and more,”* said Doyle Sams about his restored wetland on his farm in Hardin County.

### Introduction and General Description

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program began in Ohio in 1989. Mr. Sams, quoted above, is one of over 300 landowners in Ohio who have restored wetland, grassland and riparian habitats in cooperation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Landowners have been able to make their land a better place for wildlife and in the process a better place for themselves...and the public. The Partners Program in Ohio has focused on restoring wetlands, grasslands and riparian (streamside) habitats.

### Habitats of Special Concern

Many watersheds within the State are significant in terms of migratory birds and in-stream species. These watersheds are home to several federally threatened and endangered species. For example, the Lake Erie watersnake occurs nowhere else in the world except the Lake Erie Islands and the clubshell and northern riffleshell mussels survive in only a few streams. The purple catpaw mussel exists in only one known location in the world as well, Killbuck Creek. The first reintroduction of the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly in the U.S. occurred in the northwestern region of the State.



The steps to success - a typical wetland restoration in Ohio.

Also, the Darby Creek and Little Miami watersheds have historically served as resting and feeding areas for migratory waterfowl.

### Threats

#### *Conversion to Agricultural Use*

Historically, wetlands accounted for 20 percent of Ohio's land area. Over the past 200 years, Ohio has witnessed the conversion of most of its wetlands. Ohio now claims the second highest percentage of wetland loss in the nation; approximately 90 percent of its historic wetlands have been drained. Many of the State's natural resources, including most of the vast hardwood forests, were degraded and converted beginning early in the 19th century for agriculture.

#### *Urban Development*

Today, urban development and its related impacts pose the second greatest threat to existing wetlands and native grassland. Grasslands historically spanned an estimated 1,000 square miles in Ohio. Native grasslands, and their associated habitats such as oak savanna, have nearly disappeared.

#### *Streamside and In-stream Alterations*

Riparian habitat has been altered, removed and encroached upon by development and agriculture throughout the State. Agriculture accounts for slightly more than 50 percent of the land area of the State. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency now ranks agriculture as having the broadest impact upon streams in the State. While water quality in many

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streams has improved as the result of the Clean Water Act, only 53 percent of the monitored stream miles currently meet their aquatic life use designations.

Also, over 6,000 dams built for flood control, and stream channelization for drainage have blocked the movement and impaired the reproduction of many fish and freshwater mussels and clams.

As the landscape has changed in Ohio, so have the fish and wildlife populations that relied on them. Ohio has experienced declines in waterfowl, grassland nesting birds, fish, and many forest-dependent species.

## **Conservation Strategies**

### ***Wetland Restoration***

Because of the historic importance of Ohio's wetlands for many migratory birds, including waterfowl, the Partners Program in Ohio has focused on wetland restoration. Restoring marginal agricultural land back to wetland habitat often requires breaking and rerouting drainage tile. Care is taken to design each project to avoid impacting the property of adjoining landowners. Cooperative agreements with interested soil and water conservation districts, park districts, and municipalities have been successful in achieving

restoration of a variety of wetland types.

The average cost of wetland restoration is \$700 per acre. Most restoration projects are targeted at the Lake Plain area adjacent to Lake Erie, and delivered by Partners Program personnel at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Another focus area is north and west-central Ohio, where historically, larger areas of wetlands existed.



**A wetland restored through the Partners Program - note the Canada goose nest with eggs in the foreground.**

### ***Stream and Riparian Area Revitalization***

Streams and riparian areas support fish, mussels, amphibians, reptiles, migratory birds, and many other species. One restoration technique

that is cost effective is streamside or riparian fencing. This method is being used for livestock control. Recently the Partners Program has joined with the Ohio Livestock Coalition and the Ohio Division of Wildlife to establish a cooperative cost-share program that encourages installation of riparian fencing in areas where livestock currently roam freely in streams and stream corridors. The cost of streamside fencing is \$1.50 per linear foot.

### ***Grassland Restoration***

High quality grasslands with varying amounts of standing vegetation throughout the year provide nesting habitat and cover for many species of migratory birds. Because almost all of the native grassland and pastureland in Ohio has disappeared over the past 60 years, the populations of many non-game grassland migratory birds species (e.g., sedge wren, upland sandpiper, bobolink and eastern meadowlark) are in serious decline in the State and throughout the Midwest.

Grasslands are improved by removing aggressive non-native grasses (i.e., fescues), interseeding with native plant seeds (to increase the diversity of grasses and forbs), and establishing better grassland management systems (e.g., when to hay, graze, burn) to benefit wildlife. The cost to enhance or restore grasslands is \$200 per acre.

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## Partners

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Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Farm Service Agency  
Ohio Division of Wildlife  
Ohio Division of Soil and Water  
Ohio Division of Natural Areas  
Ohio Division of Forestry  
Ohio Civilian Conservation Corps  
The Ohio State University  
Union Soil and Water Conservation District  
Madison SWCD  
Hamilton SWCD  
Fayette SWCD  
Darke SWCD  
Paulding SWCD  
Hardin SWCD  
Franklin SWCD  
Hamilton County Park District  
Franklin County Metropark District  
Miami County Park District  
City of Westerville  
Cincinnati Gas and Electric  
The Nature Conservancy  
Heidelberg College  
Monsanto  
Pheasants Forever



Bottomland hardwood forest restoration with a boardwalk for outdoor education.

Ohio Livestock Coalition

## Accomplishments

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- Since 1989, the Partners Program has restored approximately 2,200 acres of wetland.
- Over 1,100 acres of grassland have been restored.

## Future Needs

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- The 1994 Ohio Wetlands Task Force recommended a restoration goal of 400,000 acres of wetland by 2010.
- Restore 1,000 miles of stream and streamside habitat.
- Restore and enhance 500 acres of native grassland.



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## CONTACT

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